



Memorandum / Note

TO / DESTINATAIRE	IDRC Board of Governors
DATE	26 May 2015
FROM / EXPÉDITEUR	Sue Szabo, Director, Social and Economic Policy, via Stephen J. McGurk, Acting Vice President Programs and Partnerships
SUBJECT / OBJET	Management response to the external reviews of the Social and Economic Policy programs on Governance, Security and Justice, and Supporting Inclusive Growth

Purpose: For discussion

This memo presents management's response to external reviews of two Social and Economic Policy programs which officially began in April 2011: Governance, Security and Justice, and Supporting Inclusive Growth.

Management recognizes the value of the overall findings of the external reviews of both programs, from which we have drawn important lessons. The two evaluations illustrate the trade-offs inherent in the focus on policy influence in the evaluation methodology: ability to assess results through a review of older, closed projects, versus ability to assess the progress in program direction and implementation through review of newer projects. The former was emphasized in the Supporting Inclusive Growth case, leaning more heavily toward projects already in the portfolio when the program began in April 2011, while the Governance, Security and Justice review placed more emphasis on program implementation after April 2011. Given these different emphases, Management views that the Supporting Inclusive Growth evaluation limited learning about program direction and capacity building, although it was able to underline program excellence in policy outreach.

Management is satisfied with the overall results achieved by the programs, and in particular the trend toward stronger results over the period of program implementation, especially given the context of budget contractions as part of the Deficit Reduction Action Plan of the Government of Canada. The results of both programs speak to the readiness of staff to adapt programming to changed circumstances and to evidence of where investments are having a larger impact. One element of this adaptation is strengthened engagement with Canadian partners, in government, academia, NGOs and increasingly the private sector. Both programs are well positioned to deliver on the vision and objectives set out in IDRC's Strategic Plan 2015-2020. The 2015-2020 Social and Economic Policy Implementation Plan reflects the key recommendations of the external reviews. As with all IDRC program external reviews, the review findings are an important, but not sole, contributor to decisions about future program design.

Outcomes and results

Management acknowledges that the reviewers found mixed results in the programs. Among the three outcome areas of knowledge generation, capacity building and policy influence, the most significant for both programs was their influence on policy. We also note the reviewers' findings that the

contributions to knowledge of both programs are more evident at the local or regional level, and appreciate that the reviewers articulated the trade-offs between generating knowledge and policy influence that is locally-grounded but also has global relevance and impact. Management agrees that to have larger impact at a global level, programs will need to continue to identify new and innovative ways to draw links between clusters of projects, to be an active knowledge broker and to partner with other like-minded donors and international actors.

Management is encouraged that critical masses of findings are emerging on a number of themes, which in turn are generating greater visibility. Examples for the Governance, Security and Justice program include citizen security in Latin America and sexual violence in South Asia; research has contributed to two new laws in India, one that broadens the definition of rape and another that protects women from sexual harassment. The program also supported the research underlying the Syrian Transition Roadmap, which engaged major political and social forces at the most senior level and produced new insights on a wide spectrum of issues that would be relevant to Syrian political transition. For the Supporting Inclusive Growth program, the Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women multi-funder initiative, and the portfolio of work on entrepreneurship, are key examples of where the program is beginning to have greater policy influence. The results of research on entrepreneurship have been traced in at least five countries and in the G8 policy context, and the research on youth entrepreneurs also generated interest among private sector actors in Africa.

Management acknowledges the finding of the Governance, Security and Justice review that capacity-building of researchers was focused primarily on individuals and, as a result, overall outcomes were more limited. This finding helps confirm the new directions of the program to experiment with larger institutional support, for example in the form of Resilience Innovation Hubs in Africa and Latin America, as well as support to establish the Arab Council for the Social Sciences, to create a critical mass of locally-grounded researchers trained in research skills. The focused capacity building efforts of Supporting Inclusive Growth were not addressed in depth by the reviewers. Management emphasizes its commitment to valuable research capacity building platforms like the Partnership for Economic Policy and the Nouveau Programme de Troisième Cycle Interuniversitaire, which annually train 100 post-graduate researchers and 100 graduate students, respectively. Management also acknowledges the reviewers' recommendation to ensure capacity building is embedded in research projects.

Quality of program-supported research

Management is pleased that the Governance, Security and Justice Program scored well on criteria such as originality and relevance, multidisciplinary research, inclusion of vulnerable populations and engagement with local knowledge, which reflected priorities in its prospectus. Management notes the concern raised on ethical and security protocols; while we believe that more robust processes have been developed during the more recent period, we accept that still more can be done to improve this and will continue with close monitoring.

Management is content with the conclusion from the Supporting Inclusive Growth program that methodological standards, engagement with local knowledge, and originality of the research were all considered acceptable, while relevance and efforts to reach policy-makers were judged to be good and, indeed, a strength of the program. Management acknowledges that there was variation in research quality and on quality control of policy inputs, and commits to ensuring greater consistency in meeting

minimum standards across projects, for instance by ensuring research outputs better spell out methodologies used and limitations.

The finding of the Supporting Inclusive Growth review that gender responsiveness was on average less than acceptable was not unexpected given the heavy weight of older, closed projects in the review. Management believes there has been significant progress, above and beyond the Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women initiative, including a consistent attention to gender across projects, and a program-initiated in-depth review on gender mainstreaming.

Management appreciates the efforts of both reviews to address the question of value-for-money, and their acknowledgement that this presents a significant challenge given the absence of international benchmarks, as well as the varied nature of outcomes sought by the programs. Management commits to improving the collection and analysis of data that can better illustrate the results of the programs relative to their own goals and to more robustly measure the contributions of the Social and Economic Policy program area to IDRC's strategic objectives. This is part of a wider IDRC effort.

Program implementation and strategy

The Governance, Security and Justice and the Supporting Inclusive Growth programs brought together four and three (respectively) earlier programs. Management is pleased that the reviewers found important advances to achieve greater focus and clarity and, in that connection, that the teams' efforts and strategic choices were innovative and adaptable. Management nonetheless acknowledges the finding that further efforts are needed to bring greater coherence to programming. This is reflected in the new Social and Economic Policy Implementation Plan, which more tightly focuses the areas of programming, which in turn will facilitate efforts to raise project level outcomes to program level results.

Management also acknowledges the need for more systematic monitoring systems to better capture and analyse results at a program-level from the wealth of existing project information, which is consistent with the IDRC-wide monitoring efforts noted above.